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SUBJECT: SEYCHELLES CAPTURES SOMALI PIRATES AFTER ATTACK ON COAST
GUARD VESSEL

11. (SBU) The Office of the President of Seychelles has announced that on December 6, officers of the Seychelles Coast Guard (SCG) arrested 11 Somali pirates, after the pirates opened fire on the SCG vessel Topaz. According to Joel Morgan -- Minister of Environment, Natural Resources and Transport and Chairman of the High Level Committee on Piracy -- the operation occurred 225 nautical miles North West of Mahe, the main island of Seychelles. Trial of the pirates in the Seychelles is anticipated, with the seizure of pirate weapons as part of the arrest expected to improve significantly the chances of successful prosecution.

12. (SBU) According to the Presidency's press release, information regarding the possible pirate activity was initially transmitted to the SCG December 6 by one of two EU/NAVFOR P-3 surveillance planes operating out of the Seychelles. The Topaz moved to the indicated position and encountered an Iranian fishing vessel. The SCG crew boarded, searched and cleared the vessel, and then resumed patrol activities. Around 1945 hours, the Topaz radar indicated "several" skiffs approaching. The skiffs opened fire on the Topaz, and the SCG vessel returned fire, disabling the skiffs. 11 Somali pirates were arrested, along with "diverse arms and weaponry." There were no casualties during the operation.

13. (SBU) In a conversation with the DCM, Jean Paul Adam, Secretary of State at the Presidency, reported that the Topaz arrived in Victoria, capital of the Seychelles, at 1015 hours December 8 and that the 11 suspected pirates are being held temporarily at a local police station. Seychelles authorities believe that the pirates will not be safe if placed with the general prison population and are thus ensuring separate detention facilities for the Somalis.

14. (SBU) Adam speculates that the pirates may have believed the Topaz was a commercial vessel, and thus attacked it. He also considers it possible that some of the pirates panicked and shot at the Topaz as it approached. According to Adam, once the Topaz returned fire the pirates immediately surrendered. Communication with the pirates is difficult, as the Seychelles authorities have no Somali translator immediately available. Translation support is expected soon from the UNODC.

15. (SBU) Adam sees prosecution of this piracy case as clear, since a Seychelles vessel was attacked and weapons used in the attack were seized. Adam expressed surprise that the pirates did not throw their weapons overboard -- as is usually the case -- and thus destroy evidence and make prosecution more difficult.

16. (SBU) The CCE element on ground in Seychelles spoke with Captain Attala, a Seychelles Coast Guard officer, who confirmed Adam's opinion that the Somalis were likely unaware the ship they were attacking was a Coast Guard vessel, as the attack on the SCG ship

occurred after dark. Attala's account differs slightly from that of the Presidency. According to Attala, the SCG encountered three vessels, one of which turned and ran once Topaz fired warning shots at the boats. Of the two vessels that stopped, SCG captured four Somalis on each skiff. The Topaz continued to search for the other skiff and subsequently found the mother ship, with three Somalis onboard, which the SCG also captured. The Coast Guard found and confiscated weapons, cell phones, and GPS equipment on the other ship. Photos of the captured skiffs can be found at the following link: <http://www.intelink.gov/go/77668>

WALKLEY